

Corzine Denounces President's Budget

Cites 'extraordinarily harsh' cuts to programs for New Jersey's neediest residents; Rails against targeting nation's 'social safety net'

Releases Preliminary Analysis of Budget's Impact on New Jersey

WASHINGTON – United States Senator Jon S. Corzine (D-NJ) today made the following remarks during a press conference call assessing the President's budget and its impact on New Jersey and the nation. Corzine's remarks are as prepared for delivery, and a preliminary analysis of the President's budget and its impact on New Jersey, appear below:

"Thank you for joining me. As I said in statements yesterday, I believe the President's budget is bad for our nation and for New Jersey.

"However, I'm not a knee jerk member of the opposition. I don't believe every item in the budget is bad and I am willing to work hard with Republicans and the White House to fashion a budget consistent with our values and priorities. For example, I think the President is right on farm subsidies which largely go to a handful of corporate farm interests in a handful of states.

"And, I strongly support the President's proposal to allocate homeland security funds based on risk – something I have fought for and which was one of the main recommendations of the 9/11 commission. I hope President Bush will support legislation Senator Lautenberg and I have introduced to make such a change in allocation the law of the land.

"So, there is some common ground on the budget on which I can work with the President. I specifically applaud his increases to the Pell Grant programs, among others. Unfortunately, these items are the exception, rather than the rule. Because while Pell Grant funding is increased, funding for vocational education, Perkins loans, and other education programs were sliced.

"On the whole, this budget is bad because it lacks the type of candor and honesty in budgeting which is necessary for bipartisan compromise and it asks those with the least to sacrifice for those who have the most. In fact, while the President says this is a fiscally responsible budget, it in fact represents the type of fiscal irresponsibility and dishonest bookkeeping that would make Ken Lay blush. While the President touts this budget as "lean" we find it to be extraordinarily lean on facts.

"The President is simply keeping two sets of books – the one he submitted yesterday which shows progress on reducing the deficit and the one which includes the actual costs of the Administration's three top priorities – the war in Iraq, privatizing

Social Security and making his tax cuts permanent – which would explode the deficit next year and in the out years.

“The additional cost of the war this year alone is estimated to be \$80 billion, and the estimated cost of the President’s privatization plan is \$4.5 trillion over the next twenty years – yet these costs, and those of his tax cuts and Alternative Minimum Tax reform are simply ignored. I want to work with the President to fashion a budget which is accountable and responsible, however we can only build trust across party lines if the Administration is honest about the full costs of its proposals. This budget fails in that regard.

“This budget also cuts vital programs which primarily aid low and middle income people. A budget is about priorities, and while the President won’t ask one millionaire or billionaire to give up one penny of their tax cuts, he is asking Congress to approve cuts to programs which help folks, many of whom are barely making ends meet. The President says this budget is lean. It is also mean.

“If this budget is adopted, our communities, our safety, our schools, our health care, our air and water quality will be sacrificed to pay for President Bush’s wrong choices. It’s our veterans, seniors, kids, and the poor who will have to suffer for the President’s wrong priorities. This is an unfortunate start to what should be a bipartisan effort to address our nation’s priorities.

“The President’s priorities are particularly wrong for New Jersey – a state which simply can not be asked to do more as a result of Washington’s and the White House’s failure to live up to its commitments.

“As a member of the Senate budget committee I will fight for programs which are important to the well being of the state and to New Jersey’s working families, including those which are unfunded, targeted for large cuts or eliminated by the President, including funding for: Amtrak, No Child Left Behind and other education programs, community development, firefighter assistance, housing, Medicaid, transportation, the Delaware River Basin Commission and low income energy assistance.

“It seems that if a program is important to New Jersey, President Bush has targeted it for irresponsible cuts or outright elimination. Under the President’s budget, 53,000 New Jersey school kids will not receive Title I educational services, 32,000 will be denied after school care, and special education, known as IDEA, is shortchanged \$100 million – money that the New Jersey taxpayers will be forced to make up.

“I am outraged that with New Jersey on the front line of the war on terror, this budget cuts by nearly one third homeland security block grants from \$1.5 billion to \$1.2 billion. So, while I appreciate the President’s support for risk based allocation, cutting homeland security funds to states at the same time may put New Jersey right back where we started – without enough homeland security funds to meet our homeland security needs.

“Furthermore, I find the President’s cuts to assistance for firefighters by \$215 million and the virtual elimination of the COPS program to be highly objectionable at a time when our first responders are serving on the front lines of the terror war. New Jersey was hit hard by the attacks of 9/11 and firefighters and police officers were among the heroes who were called on to respond to the crisis and its aftermath. The President’s proposed cuts in this area are wholly inconsistent with New Jersey’s role in the war on terror and with our values as a society. This is a clear example of the President transferring the tax responsibility, from Washington to Trenton to local communities and towns.

“And, while New Jersey’s soldiers are fighting and dying in Iraq, the President is sending the wrong message about our commitment to their sacrifice by cutting our support for Veteran’s healthcare and prescription drugs. More than 600,000 New Jersey veterans stand to see their health care costs rise as a result of the President’s budget – a slap in the face to the men and women who have fought for our freedom.

“And, while the President is fighting to extend tax cuts to those who need them the least, this budget is cutting programs designed to give a hand up to those who need the help the most. From cuts for community revitalization and low income heating assistance to Medicaid and housing, this budget lacks compassion for those in need and will, literally and figuratively, leave many of New Jersey’s most vulnerable citizens out in the cold and increase the burden on New Jersey taxpayers.

“The impacts on New Jersey are extensive. The President’s budget will shove additional unfunded mandates on a state already facing a \$4 billion budget shortfall.

“We are a nation at war, and as a lawmaker I understand the need for fiscal responsibility in managing our entitlement programs, but targeting the “Social Safety Net” for millions of Americans is wrong and reckless. New Jersey priorities simply are not met in this budget and, as such, I will fight to protect our state’s priorities and values as deliberations on the budget unfold.

“We have prepared a report on our preliminary analysis of the impact of the President’s budget on New Jersey which we will be distributing this afternoon.

“Thank you.”